

Name of Policy	Policy on Evaluation of Learning and Teaching
Description of Policy	The Policy on the Evaluation of Learning and Teaching presents a framework for undertaking evaluation to ascertain and monitor the quality of teaching and learning processes and outcomes, and in turn to provide an informed basis for making decisions to enhance teaching and learning in the University.
<input type="checkbox"/> New Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revision	

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Officer Responsible	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (S, L&T)
Contact Officer:	Director, LTC

Policy on Evaluation of Learning and Teaching

PART A – GENERAL POLICY AND PRINCIPLES

1. Introduction

Australian Catholic University is committed to high-quality learning and teaching, research, and community engagement. The Policy on the Evaluation of Learning and Teaching reflects the University's commitment to a systematic approach to evaluation and improvement of learning and teaching. It also presents a framework for evaluation to ascertain and monitor the quality of learning and teaching processes and outcomes. In turn, the Policy will provide an informed basis for making decisions to enhance and achieve continuous improvement of learning and teaching in the University.

For the purposes of this Policy, evaluation constitutes a process of gathering information to develop an understanding of one or more aspects of learning and teaching in order to draw conclusions as to its merit, worth or value, and to the factors that are helping and hindering its operation. An underpinning component of the process is critical reflection, based on sound evidence. The prime beneficiaries of such evaluation are academic staff and students, in terms of the enhancement of learning and teaching that they are able to promote and experience in the light of the evaluation findings. The evaluation process is in turn of benefit to Schools, Faculties and the University, as well as to other significant stakeholders, in terms of the information it provides and the decision-making that it helps to inform.

Evaluation is an integral element of the University's planning and development procedures, contributing to evidence-based decision-making on a continuing basis. As part of this, there are points at which the process is focused into formal evaluation exercises with distinct and discrete intended outcomes, such as

- course reviews;
- unit evaluation; and
- teaching evaluation.

2. Contextual issues

Learning and teaching comprise an educational partnership that exists within the particular context of Australian Catholic University. In evaluating learning and teaching, the unique aspects of this context need to be recognised and taken into account. These include, for example:

- the University's Mission-driven philosophy of teaching as student-centred, valuing the individuality, uniqueness and dignity of all staff and students;
- the recognition that evaluation is a value-driven, ethical process that must respect the rights of the individuals involved;
- the acceptance that evaluation is both formative and summative in nature, aimed at improving, as well as providing evidence of, the quality of learning and teaching;
- the nature and extent of interactions between the lecturer and particular student cohorts and individual students;
- the nature and extent of students' contributions to and participation in the educational partnership with their lecturer and fellow students;
- situations in which teaching is a joint and collaborative effort, with both the individual and the team contributing to its quality;
- the potential impact of resources and settings on the quality of learning and teaching;
- particular characteristics and expectations of the discipline in which the learning and teaching are occurring;
- academic backgrounds of students;
- the number of students in the units;

- the nature of the units (core or elective);
- the level of the units (undergraduate or postgraduate); and
- modes of delivery.

The quality of learning and teaching can only be understood and evaluated in their particular contexts. These contexts generate both enabling and constraining factors, and an understanding of such factors and their impacts is needed in reaching evaluative conclusions.

3. Evaluation purposes and criteria

The evaluation of learning and teaching may be undertaken for a range of purposes, such as to:

- enhance understanding of learning and teaching processes and outcomes across the University;
- provide information that will assist individuals, organisational units and the University in making decisions about how to improve or develop learning and teaching;
- assist in determining the effectiveness of units and courses and in informing course evaluation and review;
- support processes which require evidence of learning and teaching quality such as probation and progression requirements for academic staff, promotion applications and teaching award applications;
- provide evidence for quality audit processes; and
- meet expectations of external bodies such as accreditation and funding agencies.

4. Underlying principles

The following principles underpin this Policy:

- evaluation data collection should be conducted in a systematic manner;
- multiple data collection techniques and sources should be used in order to access a range of perspectives and to maximise the validity of the process;
- a focus should be placed on convergence of evidence in drawing conclusions, while ensuring openness and transparency;
- data collection procedures for each of the techniques and sources should be standardised across the University;
- the evaluation approaches adopted should enable identification of learning and teaching development that occurs over time;
- the use of evaluation data aggregated from a range of surveys for external reporting should not enable identification of any individual academic staff member or student;
- the results of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) surveys are normally confidential to an individual academic staff member, although the staff member may choose to make the data available to others in an identifiable form, including the probation, progression, performance review and career planning processes;
- student anonymity will be maintained in the reporting of SET and Student Feedback on Units (SFU) surveys;
- the results of SFU surveys are available as part of the University's quality assurance processes¹ and to inform other processes such as probation, progression, performance review and career planning;
- the collection and use of evaluation data should be designed and implemented in ways that will foster learning and teaching as an educational partnership;
- to enhance learning and teaching at individual, School, Faculty and University-wide levels, unit evaluation through SFUs should be undertaken in each teaching period in which a unit is offered;

¹ See also Policy on Unit Evaluation.

evaluation data will then be available to assess the appropriateness of existing learning and teaching contexts and to inform change where necessary.

5. Approaches to learning and teaching evaluation

The approaches adopted for evaluation of learning and teaching, and the particular requirements attaching to each approach, may vary according to the purpose(s) for which the evaluation is being undertaken. As noted in the underlying principles, however, multiple data collection techniques and sources need to be used for a range of specific purposes. Any comparison of data from multiple sources should be accompanied by:

- appropriate analysis and critical reflection on the outcomes of such feedback;
- development/design of strategies and actions to address the results of such feedback, in order to achieve improvement of unit design and delivery and student learning outcomes;
- provision of feedback to students about the results of such surveys and other feedback mechanisms, to explain the ways in which their feedback will shape future design and/or delivery of the unit.

The following are examples of ways of collecting data for the evaluation of learning and teaching in the University:

- the learning and teaching portfolio produced by an academic staff member and/or an academic unit (noting that a portfolio is required for probation and promotion purposes);
- student ratings and comments, in particular through the instruments referred to in section 6;
- reports from supervisors, colleagues or other observers of an academic staff member; and
- team deliberations involving, for example, a staff member, peers and students.

As a general requirement, student ratings and comments should be gathered every time a unit is taught.

6. Instruments to facilitate evaluation of learning and teaching

The University will utilise appropriate survey and/or other instruments to assist in the evaluation of learning and teaching. These include -

- an instrument for student feedback on, and evaluation of, units, called the Student Feedback on Units (SFU) survey;
- an instrument for evaluation of the teaching of individual members of the academic staff, whether as Lecturer-in-Charge or as a contributing lecturer or tutor, called the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET).

Such instruments will be developed and managed by the Learning and Teaching Centre. Response rates should be taken into account when analysing such data, with care being taken to avoid drawing conclusions based on very small returns

7. Ethical issues

In undertaking evaluation of learning and teaching, due regard needs to be given to the rights, privacy, dignity and entitlements of those who are participating in or who are likely to be affected by the evaluation. This relates to all elements of the evaluation, including its design, operation and reporting and subsequent use of the evaluation data and findings.

8. Roles and responsibilities

Evaluation provides a fundamental component of the learning and teaching partnership. Consequently there are distinct roles and responsibilities for each of the participants in the partnership, including academic staff, students, Schools and Faculties.

Academic staff play a leading role in helping to establish with their students a learning and teaching climate that encourages and incorporates reflective evaluation, on a continuing basis, that is seen to carry benefit for their students, themselves, the University and the wider community.

Students play an important role, not only as providers of critical evaluation data but also as co-contributors to the conceptualisation and implementation of optimal learning settings in the light of those data.

Schools and Faculties play a supporting and enabling role, seeking to promote the use of evaluation data and findings in ways that serve the interests of staff, students and the University.

The **Learning and Teaching Centre** facilitates the conduct of SET and SFU surveys and the dissemination of the results thereof in accordance with this Policy.

The **Learning and Teaching Evaluation Committee** reports and provides advice to the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

All of the partners carry responsibility for providing honest and timely feedback to those who have participated in or who are likely to be affected by the evaluation.

These various roles and responsibilities imply an openness of process in which the intentions and procedures are clearly identified in advance and faithfully adhered to in practice.

PART B – RELATED DOCUMENTS

9. Other related documents and policies

This Policy underpins and complements other documents and policies of the University that in turn provide detailed and specific requirements, guidelines and advice. These include:

- Learning and Teaching Thematic Map
- Policy on Quality in Learning and Teaching
- Policy on Quality in Online Learning and Teaching
- Policy on Unit Evaluation
- Code of Ethics in Teaching
- Policy on Course Approval, Amendment and Review
- Academic Staff Probation Policies and Procedures
- Academic Staff Performance Review and Career Planning Program: Policies and Procedures
- Excellence in Teaching Awards
- Academic Staff Promotion Policies and Procedures.